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SUBJECT: NATIONAL MUSLIM GROUP SPOKESMAN WELCOMES GERMAN GOVERNMENT'S
POST RAMADAN DINNER

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¶1. (U) In an October 16 conversation with Duesseldorf Pol/Econ Officer, Bekir Alboga, the new spokesperson for the Muslim Coordination Council (KRM) commented positively on a dinner he attended in Berlin the day before hosted by Federal Interior Minister Schaeuble, to celebrate the end of Ramadan. Representatives from all four umbrella organizations (DITIB, ZMD, VIKZ and Islamrat) were present, as well as select other Muslim leaders. Chancellor Merkel was a surprise guest who, according to Alboga, was very inquisitive and engaged. To our knowledge, news of this event has not appeared in the German media.

¶2. (SBU) Alboga was elated and touched by the gesture and remarked that this was the first time that the German government has held a Ramadan-related event at such a high level. He noted, however, that "the German government has not been as fast as the US Embassy" in engaging Muslims around Ramadan. Or, as another national Muslim leader said, "so far it has been unimaginable for us to be received at President Koehler's official residence in Berlin, as American Muslims have been at the White House -- for the last seven years!" Alboga added that Koehler congratulated Muslims on Ramadan privately, via letter, this year but not officially, as for example via a press release. He expressed satisfaction at this step, but would have liked to see the German government celebrate Ramadan more publicly.

¶3. (U) Briefly outlining his strategic plan for the next six months he will be spokesman (the position rotates between the four KRM constituent groups), Alboga said his main objective is to create KRM-like structures at the state level throughout Germany in order to fulfill the organizational prerequisites to offer Islamic religious instruction in public schools (modeled after Christian religious instruction). In this connection, Alboga commented on the fact that in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) the Alevites (a liberal Muslim group) already have this possibility, saying, "if the Alleviates have this right, it's high time we (i.e. the Muslim groups organized in the KRM) have it too."

Comment

¶4. (SBU) Alboga's observations were the latest we have heard from senior Muslims in NRW who have commented favorably, privately and publicly, on the USG approach to hosting Iftars -- at the White House, by Embassies, and by Consulates like ours. While the NRW government has begun to host these events (doing so for the second consecutive year in September), a number of contacts have noted the comparative lack of engagement around Ramadan at the Federal level. We have no indication that the example set by Mission Germany directly influenced Interior

Minister Schaeuble to host this dinner, but the implicit comparison with the USG appears to be widely understood in Muslim communities in Germany and reflects favorably on Mission activities. This may presage greater German engagement in Ramadan 2008. End Comment.

15. (U) This message was coordinated with Embassy Berlin.

BOYSE